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ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes a larger document of the same title which examines early intervention programs providing services and resources to encourage low-income/minority youth to finish high school and enter college. It notes provisions of federal law which encourage such programs and the unifying mission of the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership Program. Such programs are seen as either broad early intervention programs, "academic outreach" programs operated by academic institutions and designed to encourage at-risk students to plan for college, or school-college collaboration programs. Programs are differentiated into six types: (1) programs established by philanthropic agencies, (2) federally supported programs, (3) state-sponsored programs with matching federal support, (4) entirely state-supported programs, (5) systemic changes involving school-college collaboration, and (6) college- or university-sponsored programs. Implications of the growth of these programs for college and university administrators are considered and include recommendations to coordinate institutional outreach programs with early intervention programs and document efforts to increase access to their institutions. (DB)

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The growth of early intervention programs reflects America's commitment to high levels of educational attainment for all citizens. This commitment is embodied in the national ideal of equal educational opportunity without regard to social or economic status. Early intervention programs offer new hope to youth who are disproportionately "at risk" of inadequate educational attainment by providing financial assistance and encouragement to them, their families, and their communities. An important goal of early intervention is to facilitate a seamless transition from elementary to secondary to higher education. To reach this goal, educators at all levels must develop and implement coordinated policies and planning strategies. Early intervention is aided by funds from federal agencies, state agencies, local governments, and philanthropic organizations.

What Is Early Intervention?

The number and diversity of programs providing services and resources to encourage low-income/minority youth to finish high school and enter college have been burgeoning since the early 1980s. The mission statement of the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership program is a unifying concept for early intervention. The federal law encourages provision of financial assistance to low-income students to obtain high school diplomas and to foster the pursuit of higher education. The law also encourages states, local education agencies, community organizations, and private entities to provide a variety of information and support services for elementary, middle, and secondary students at risk of dropping out. These public and private agencies provide services, including mentoring, tutoring, and information, to help low-income and minority students obtain high school diplomas and seek admission to college. Many such programs attempt to eliminate the financial barriers to higher education by guaranteeing needed financial assistance for at-risk students if they graduate from high school and meet other criteria. The underlying assumption is that intervention early in the educational pipeline will help to prevent dropouts and increase the number of students who pursue higher education.

"Academic outreach" programs that originate in schools, colleges, and universities are a subset of the broader concept of early intervention. Academic outreach programs are differentiated from early intervention programs in that academic outreach programs are operated by academic institutions (although the source of funds and sponsor of the programs might be outside the institution). Although the distinctions between academic outreach and early intervention programs are imprecise, this distinction helps to identify the types of institutionally operated programs that can be directly affected by institutional faculty and administrators.

Academic outreach programs are similar in purpose to early intervention programs but are not always articulated or coordinated with them. The general purpose of most academic outreach programs is to encourage at-risk students to plan for college, with no focus on specific academic disciplines. Some academic outreach programs, however, focus on preparation and recruitment of promising at-risk students for selected academic disciplines. Academic outreach includes generally enhancing educational opportunity for underserved students within an institution's service area as well as increasing the number of at-risk students enrolled in specific academic disciplines. Thus, these programs are mutually beneficial to both underserved students and institutions of higher education.

A third type of approach to early intervention is the rapidly growing school-college collaboration movement, which involves systemic changes triggered by the reforms beginning in the early 1980s that attempt to close the traditional gap between K-12 and higher education. A new perspective, K-16, began to emerge in the 1980s in discussions of educational accountability. Early intervention programs that are built upon the collaborative efforts of K-12 and higher education institutions have gained momentum toward K-16 alliances. One of the most promising examples of such collaboration is the concept of "middle college," which melds the last two years

of high school with the two years offered in public community colleges. Such alliances enhance the recruitment of minority students and increase the readiness of entering freshmen.

What Types of Early Intervention Programs Have Been Established?

Basically, early intervention programs take six forms: programs established by philanthropic agencies, federally supported programs, state-sponsored programs with matching federal support, entirely state-supported programs, systemic changes involving school-college collaboration, and college- or university-sponsored programs. In certain cases, programs began with private seed money from philanthropic organizations and later evolved into publicly sponsored programs. The many early intervention/academic outreach programs are varied and uncoordinated, and there is no national clearinghouse or database that tracks the growth of local, state, or federal programs.

What Are the Implications of the Growth of Early Intervention Programs for College and University Administrators?

Early intervention programs provide colleges and universities with a powerful tool to recruit disadvantaged students who need a broad base of support to enroll in and then graduate from college. By forming strong coalitions with schools and community leaders to collaborate in the development of innovative services and methods of delivery, higher education administrators can contribute to and capitalize on the wealth of offerings. Specifically, they can leverage institutional early intervention efforts by surveying the federal, state, regional, and local programs that can directly affect their institution, and by developing strategies and structures to coordinate institutional outreach programs with the multitude of early intervention programs that originate in both the public and private sectors. These developments can help overcome duplicative efforts and gaps in service caused by the current lack of coordination between institutions and programs.

Faculty members and administrators of colleges and universities recognize the importance of support from the public, from elected officials, and from philanthropic organizations, made evident in the recent trend toward the development of state "report cards" for higher education systems. One of the most common components of report cards is the assessment of access to public higher education, especially for underrepresented students. Institutions must demonstrate increased access to their institutions and success in the retention of diverse students. Colleges and universities must marshal and refine their resources to achieve these outcomes. Many institutions rely on remedial education to increase enrollments of students from underserved populations, but in many states, governors, legislators, and governing boards have criticized the need for postsecondary remedial education. Perhaps early intervention and academic outreach programs will enhance students' readiness and diminish the need for remedial education.

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